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FREDERICK THE GREAT AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

IN attempting to arrive at a conclusion upon the much-debated subject of the attitude of Frederick the Great toward the American Revolution, the reader should constantly bear in mind two important facts about which there is no room for dispute.¹ One of these facts is that Frederick entertained an intense hatred for England, and was consequently glad to see her humiliated; the other, that his interests were such that he was unwilling openly to become her enemy. His hatred dated from the year 1761. Up to that time the English government, under the leadership of Pitt, whose policy was to "conquer America in Germany", had for some years supported him in his unequal contest against his allied enemies by undertaking the defense of his western frontier against the French and by furnishing him an annual subsidy of about £700,000. But in 1761 the Great Commoner was driven out of office; the Tory party, led by the Scotch favorite, the Earl of Bute, seized the reins of power, and at once proceeded in a most treacherous manner to desert their hard-pressed ally by making terms with France. This was an action that Frederick never forgave, and thereafter he entertained toward England, and particularly toward the party in

¹ The most useful source in determining Frederick's attitude is the voluminous correspondence between him and his ministers at home and abroad. This correspondence, in which Frederick expressed himself without reserve, is accessible in the archives at Berlin and in transcript form in the Bancroft Papers in the Lenox Library, New York city; yet, strange to say, no American writer, save Bancroft himself, seems to have made use of it. Many of the others who have felt called upon to discuss the subject have been content to glean their arguments from secondary sources, while a few have consulted the diplomatic correspondence of the Revolutionary period in the editions of Sparks or Wharton. Unfortunately, even Bancroft did his work under circumstances that rendered it difficult for him to be impartial. At the time he wrote his chapter on "The Relations of Two New Powers" (Vol. X., original edition, 1874) he was our representative at the court of Berlin, and was, there is reason to think, somewhat carried away by his enthusiasm for the new German Empire. Consequently he wrote in such a way as to cause certain writers, among them M. Henri Doniol, author of the monumental work *Histoire de la Participation de la France à l'Établissement des États-Unis*, to regard him as "the inventor of the gratitude due from America to Germany". Adolphe de Circourt, *Histoire de l'Action Commune de la France et de l'Amérique pour l'Indépendance des États-Unis*, Paris, 1876, Volume III., contains some of these letters. The subject is also discussed in Friedrich Kapp, *Friedrich der Grosse und die Vereinigten Staaten von America*, Leipzig, 1871. A review of the facts with quotations from the correspondence seems, however, worth while.

power, the most bitter resentment. Nor was this feeling lessened in intensity when about a decade later, at the time of the first partition of Poland, the British intrigued to prevent him from acquiring Danzig.

Frederick's writings are full of passages in which he vents his hatred toward his former ally. In his *Memoirs after the Peace* occurs the following: "The King of Prussia had more cause for complaint than all the rest [of the European powers]. He had to reproach the English monarch with the peace he had concluded with France, by which England had abandoned Prussia, and with all the arts that had been used to dispossess him of the port of Danzig."¹ He frequently expressed his hostility elsewhere.² "My indifference for this latter power" [England], he said at one time, "can surprise nobody: 'a scalded cat dreads cold water', says the proverb; and, in fact, what union could be contracted with this crown after the signal experience I have had of its duplicity? If it would give me all the millions possible, I would not furnish it two small files of my troops."³ In the same strain he wrote on January 20, 1778: "Meanwhile, I do not wish to dissimulate to you, for however much England may attempt to ally herself with me, I will never consent. I cannot be won over with money as so many other German princes have been. My unalterable determination is not to contract an alliance with a power which has deceived me so infamously as did England in the last war."

Against Bute, whom he blamed as the author of the desertion, and whom he believed, though wrongly, as we know to-day, to be still the power behind the English king and ministry, Frederick entertained the most intense personal bitterness. "The Scotch earl Bute", he wrote, "governed the king and the kingdom. Resembling those malignant spirits of which we continually speak, but which we never see, he concealed both himself and his operations in deep darkness. His emissaries, his creatures, were the engines by which he moved the political machine, according to his will. His system of politics was that of the old Tories, who maintained that the happiness of England required that the king should enjoy despotic power."⁴

¹ Frederick's *Works* (Holcroft's translation), IV. 179.

² See, for example, letters to Baron de Maltzan, his minister to England, January 3, 1774; November 6, 1775; March 31, 1777, in Circourt, III. 162, 179, 208.

³ Frederick to de Maltzan, April 7, 1777, *ibid.*, 209. When not otherwise stated, the reference is to the Bancroft Papers. When the date and the names of writer and recipient are given, no note is attached if the letter is in the Bancroft Papers, unless attention is called to it as being also in Sparks or Wharton. Most of the letters referred to as being in Sparks and Wharton are also in the Bancroft Papers.

⁴ *Works*, IV. 172. See for a humorous expression of his hatred for Bute a letter

But though Frederick hated England, and especially the party that ruled her, he did not wish to go to war with her. Although the first soldier of his age, Frederick wished peace. His concern was for Prussia; and since the dark and stormy days of the Seven Years' War, when his kingdom had come so near to shipwreck, he had grown cautious. He knew that young Emperor Joseph II. was full of ambitious schemes for the aggrandizement of Austria and for the humiliation of Prussia, and he was too wise a ruler to further the aims of his enemies by allowing personal prejudice to lead him into open hostility to such a formidable power as England. This attitude is unmistakably revealed in a passage in his *Memoirs after the Peace*. "This", wrote he regarding his refusal to allow the passage across his dominions of German troops hired by England, "was taking but a feeble revenge for the evil proceedings relative to the port of Danzig; neither did the king desire to come to extremities. Long experience had taught him that a multitude of enemies are found in the world, and that we ought not in sport to raise up foes."¹

In view of Frederick's hatred of England, it was but natural that he should be interested in her troubles with the colonies. As early as June 27, 1774, we find him writing to de Maltzan that he was "curious to see the end of the Bostonian heroism",² and that he wished de Maltzan to pay attention to the quarrel in order to keep him well-informed. Later he said that the colonies were evidently firmly resolved to sustain their liberties and that he disapproved of the English policy.³ Still later he expressed the opinion that it was a hundred to one that regulars would be able to beat militia, but that the colonies would doubtless be able to make British commerce and manufactures suffer greatly, and that Parliament might one day regret having pushed things so far.⁴ His judgment upon the policy adopted toward the colonies was spoken in no uncertain terms. "The treatment which the colonies are experiencing", he wrote on September 11, 1775, "appears to me to be the first step toward despotism; and if Lord Bute succeeds in it, the mother-country will likewise have her turn, and they will attempt to subjugate her and to lay down the law to her as they are laying it down to the colonies."⁵

to de Maltzan, November 17, 1777. In another letter, dated Dec. 18, 1777, he wrote, "Quand les Bretons un Lord Bute pendront, Lors leurs guerres par tout prosperont."

¹ *Works*, IV. 178.

² Circourt, III. 162.

³ Frederick to de Maltzan, November 14, 1774, *ibid.*, 163.

⁴ Frederick to de Maltzan, February 6 and May 15, 1775, *ibid.*, 168, 172.

⁵ Frederick to de Maltzan September 11, 1775, *ibid.*, 176.

But, though he disapproved of the English policy, he felt that the matter was one in which he was not directly concerned. On February 27, 1775, he said that he did not intend to meddle in the quarrel, but a week later he expressed satisfaction over the fact that the more confused the English affairs became, the less there would be to apprehend for the peace of Europe.¹ In the following June he declared that he would continue to be a "tranquil spectator", and would "await the *dénouement* of the scene with indifference."² The first suggestion made to Frederick that he should form a connection with the Americans appears to have come from de Maltzan, who had been approached by an American agent in London.³ De Maltzan proposed that the king should open commercial relations with the Americans; but Frederick replied: "What you add concerning the establishment of a direct commerce appears to me, considering the actual relations between my state and America, still very problematical. Of all the merchandise in exchange, Virginia tobacco would be the principal article. But without a navy how do you expect me to protect such a commerce or make it respected?"⁴ A month later he expressed himself again in much the same terms.⁵

In the following November a more direct overture was made to the Prussian monarch. In that month William Carmichael was sent by Silas Deane, then agent of the colonies in Paris, to Berlin to make proposals of a commercial nature.⁶ Carmichael accomplished nothing of importance. He explained the character of American products to the Prussian authorities, but found Frederick unwilling to undertake a direct commerce, though he expressed himself willing to exchange commodities through the ports of France.⁷ The next attempt at an understanding was made by the three American commissioners, Deane, Franklin, and Lee, who, in pursuance of the so-called "militia" diplomatic policy, on February 14, 1777, transmitted to the Prussian court copies of the Declaration of Independence and of the Articles of Confederation, and in a letter expressed a desire to obtain Frederick's friendship and to lay before him a plan for commercial intercourse.⁸

¹ Frederick to de Maltzan, February 27 and March 6, 1775, *ibid.*, 170, 171.

² Frederick to de Maltzan, June 29, 1775, *ibid.*, 173.

³ De Maltzan to Frederick, May 21, 1776.

⁴ Frederick to de Maltzan, June 3, 1776, Circourt, III. 195.

⁵ Frederick to de Maltzan, July 1, 1776, *ibid.*, 196.

⁶ Deane to the Committee of Secret Correspondence, Oct. 1, Dec. 3, 1776; Carmichael to the same, Nov. 2, 1776: in Sparks and Wharton; Barnier to Eden, Dec. 14, 21, 1776.

⁷ Schulenburg to Frederick, November 30 and December 2, 1776; Frederick to Goltz, December 2, 1776.

⁸ Circourt, III. 6.

Concerning the proposals made in this letter Frederick wrote from Potsdam to Baron Schulenburg, his minister of state, expressing to him the opinion that since Prussia was without a navy to protect such a commerce, it would be necessary to make use of a foreign flag. But he added:

However, in spite of these considerations, I do not wish to disoblige nor to offend the colonies by a complete refusal of the propositions of their plenipotentiary commissioners at Paris, and it appears to me to be more expedient for you by a civil answer to attempt to keep them in the friendly disposition they appear to entertain towards us. . . In this way the above-mentioned colonies will not be offended, and we shall have the means of entering into negotiations with them should circumstances become more favorable. Then our Silesian linens, our woolens, and other manufactured articles can find a new market. . . All that I recommend to you, then, is to put nothing into your answer to the said plenipotentiaries that can displease or offend their employers, but explain your position toward their offer as favorably as possible, so that the moment events become more propitious there we may be able to take advantage of it.¹

From this and other extracts already quoted it is easy to see that Frederick's policy was, outwardly at least, to maintain a strict neutrality; for, although he was quite willing to see England humiliated, his interests dictated that he should not become embroiled in a war with her. In pursuance of this policy it was impossible for him to fall in with the proposals of the colonists, yet at the same time he wished to avoid offending them, for he hoped thereby to keep a way for opening a profitable commerce with them in case they should prove successful.

On March 15 Schulenburg wrote to the commissioners and stated something of Frederick's position. On the nineteenth of the following month the commissioners again wrote a letter in which they informed Schulenburg that an accredited minister would be sent to Berlin "properly empowered to treat upon affairs of importance", and that in order to hasten the establishment of a commerce, one of their own number would shortly visit the Prussian court. The plan did not meet the approval of Frederick, so he wrote to Schulenburg that the colonies were "in too much of a hurry with their propositions for a formal negotiation", and restated the position he had taken in his letter of March 12.² Schulenburg, therefore, wrote to Arthur Lee, the commissioner chosen to undertake the mission,³ in order to discourage him from coming to Berlin.⁴ But since Lee journeyed by way of Vienna, it would seem that the letter

¹ Frederick to Schulenburg, March 12, 1777. See also Kapp, 22-23.

² Frederick to Schulenburg, May 6, 1777, Circourt, III. 89.

³ Arthur Lee to Schulenburg, May 8, 1777, in Sparks and Wharton.

⁴ Schulenburg to Arthur Lee, May 20, 1777, in Sparks and Wharton.

did not reach him until after his departure from Paris, and perhaps not until his arrival at Berlin.

When Lee reached Berlin, he announced his presence there in a short note to Schulenburg.¹ Two days later he wrote a longer letter in which he discussed the advantages that would result from commercial relations, and also said, "If I had known His Majesty's pleasure before my departure, I should have acted in conformity with it. And if my residence here should give the least uneasiness to your court, I rely upon your excellency's informing me of it." Schulenburg replied that his residence at Berlin would not be at all disagreeable to the king, provided Lee lived as an individual and without assuming a public character. In the same letter he asked for "a memorandum of places where insurance can be effected on vessels destined for America, and the premium of insurance to be paid."² Next day Lee sent the desired information, and added that if the powers of Europe would but open their ports to American war vessels, the problem of commerce would be solved, for then convoys could be fitted out to protect the vessels engaged in it.³ Schulenburg admitted that a commerce between the two countries would probably be profitable, but said that on account of the scantiness of the Prussian merchant marine an effort would have to be made to get the owners of vessels in Holland and Hamburg to carry the goods.⁴ Of course Lee was very far from being content with this answer, for he realized that such a commerce would be of very little importance, and his great aim was to get the Prussian king to commit himself on the side of the Americans. Accordingly, he informed Schulenburg that since the American merchant vessels were also privateers, the only possible way to establish a commerce "hither in the commodities and vessels of the States" would be to open the Prussian ports to the privateers.⁵ Schulenburg replied, however, that while the king was well disposed towards the Americans, he could not afford to embroil himself with the court of London. "Moreover," said he, "our ports have hitherto received only merchant vessels, and no ships of war nor privateers have ever entered there, so that the officers stationed at our ports would be embarrassed how to conduct themselves on such an occasion." Before a final answer could be given, it would be necessary to ascertain the attitude taken by France and Spain concerning the reception of privateers.⁶

¹ A. Lee to Schulenburg, June 5, 1777, in Sparks and Wharton.

² Schulenburg to A. Lee, June 9, 1777, in Sparks and Wharton.

³ A. Lee to Schulenburg, June 10, 1777, in Sparks and Wharton.

⁴ Schulenburg to A. Lee, June 18, 1777, in Sparks and Wharton.

⁵ A. Lee to Schulenburg, June 20, 1777, in Sparks and Wharton.

⁶ Schulenburg to A. Lee, June 26, 1777, in Sparks and Wharton.

In these negotiations Schulenburg was but the mouthpiece of his master, and from the latter's instructions to the minister and from his other correspondence it is not difficult to determine Frederick's attitude. On June 23 he had written from Potsdam to Schulenburg in Berlin, "It is necessary to continue the same tone with him and to tell him that although I am well disposed toward his constituents, he will himself feel that they ought not to expect that in order to favor them I should embroil myself with England."¹ Frederick was, in fact, playing a waiting game. To his brother, Prince Henry, he had written about a week earlier, "I purpose to draw out this negotiation in order to fall in with the side for which Fortune shall declare herself." In a similar strain he had written to Baron Goltz, his minister to France: "As to the deputies of the Congress, I still hesitate as to the course to take toward them. It is necessary to await the turn in their affairs."² To de Maltzan at London he wrote, "There has arrived at my court a deputy of the colonies to propose to me a commercial treaty; but as their independence is not yet decided, you will readily see that I have not wished to enter into negotiations with him."³ At that time, with the outcome of the expeditions of Howe and Burgoyne uncertain, the prospects of the colonies were not very bright, and consequently Frederick was more than usually unwilling to do in their behalf anything that would bring upon him the resentment of England. At the same time, however, he wished to avoid offending the colonies, for he foresaw that the time might come when it would be desirable to have a way open for a commercial connection. Because of his dislike for England he naturally inclined to wish that the colonies would prove successful; but, as he many times wrote, the whole matter was really indifferent to him.

The negotiations were now complicated by an extraordinary episode. The English minister, Hugh Elliot, a man whom Finckenstein characterized as "very young and very rash",⁴ had naturally taken great interest in the presence of Lee in Berlin. As a result of this interest a servant of the English embassy entered Lee's lodgings, broke open his desk, and stole his papers. By some writers it has been asserted that the English minister directly instigated this remarkable robbery, and Bancroft states that the robber was hired for 1,000 guineas.⁵ Such may have been the case. Years afterward, however, Elliot assured John Quincy Adams upon his word of honor that the servant acted without express orders and merely out of the

¹ Circourt, III. 95.

² Frederick to Goltz, June 7, 1777, *ibid.*, 92.

³ Frederick to de Maltzan, June 23, 1777, *ibid.*, 94.

⁴ Finckenstein to Schulenburg, June 28, 1777.

⁵ Bancroft, IX. 174 (original edition, 1866).

knowledge that Elliot was curious to know what headway Lee was making in his negotiations.¹ However this may have been, there is no question that, the papers once obtained, Elliot was not above looking them over. Copies of them were taken, after which the originals were left on Lee's staircase, while the servant was spirited out of the kingdom.²

The theft caused much comment at Berlin, and made Frederick very angry, but he took no violent action against the English minister. His attitude in the matter is revealed in the following extract from a letter to de Maltzan :

But I must tell you of an act of singular daring and recklessness on the part of Chevalier Elliot. That minister took the liberty, through one of his domestics, of abstracting the portfolio of Lee, the American, from his desk in the *auberge de Corsica*, in Berlin ; and the theft having made a noise, he not only brought back the portfolio to the American, but, moreover, came himself to avow the theft to my minister, with all the circumstances that accompanied it, making various poor excuses for the part he took in it. It is properly what is called a public theft ; and if I had wished to make him feel the resentment which the law of nations authorizes, and which he richly deserved, I would immediately have forbidden him the court. But having himself told his fault, and having submitted his person and his sentence to my discretion and generosity, I did not wish to push things to an extreme, and confined myself to notifying him through my ministers of the impropriety and lawlessness of his conduct.

Such, in fine, is the minister whom the court where you are has chosen to reside at mine, and you can judge very well what would have been the sensation created by a similar performance there, and how the chevalier Elliot would have been regarded. It is in the school of Bute that such scholars are found.

[In the handwriting of Frederick.] Oh ! the worthy pupil of Bute ! Oh ! *l'homme incomparable que votre Gott Damme Elliot !* In truth, the English ought to blush with shame at sending such ministers to foreign courts.³

The British government made haste to disavow the action of its minister, both through that minister himself and also through de Maltzan, and Frederick was told that he was at liberty to signify a desire for Elliot's recall.⁴ But the king was not desirous of further straining his relations with England, so he gave to Hertzberg

¹ J. Q. Adams, *Letters on Silesia*, London, 1804, 257-258.

² For accounts of the theft see Lee to the Commissioners, June 28, 1777, and to the Committee of Foreign Affairs, July 28, 1777 ; Frederick to de Maltzan, June 30, 1777, Circourt, III, 211 ; Hertzberg to Frederick, June 28, 1777 ; and other letters. A portion of this correspondence is given by Sparks and Wharton. Carlyle's *Frederick*, VI. 343-345, contains a not very accurate account of the affair. See also the *North American Review* for April, 1830.

³ Frederick to de Maltzan, June 30, 1777, Circourt, III. 211 ; in Sparks and Wharton.

⁴ Hertzberg to Frederick, June 28, June 30, August 11, and August 26, 1777 ; de Maltzan to Frederick, August 1, 1777 ; etc.

the following directions: "I do not wish a noise to be made over this affair, and you have only to say to him that out of consideration for the king of England and of his own youth we will pass over the matter in silence."¹ To Lee, the man who had suffered from the theft, but little satisfaction was given,² except what might be gained from receiving a copy of the magistracy proceedings, which had been begun before the real nature of the theft had become known. This copy he desired for use in proving to his associates his own fidelity and loyalty.³ It would, however, be a mistake to infer from this lack of action on the part of Frederick any unfriendliness towards the colonies. Frederick was but following his policy of keeping out of the struggle. The theft aroused his anger, but he did not feel that it was wise to punish it; for, while the resentment of the colonies was not a thing to be feared, that of England was.

Shortly afterward Lee quitted Berlin for Paris, but not before he had received a definite answer upon the points in the negotiation. Schulenburg informed him that the propositions were not acceptable, as they put the affairs of the king in jeopardy without giving the hope of any very solid advantages.⁴ Thus closed this effort to obtain the assistance of Prussia.

The later negotiations were carried on entirely by correspondence. Lee had obtained permission to keep the Prussian court informed of the progress of the war, and in the next few weeks he took advantage of the permission to write two letters urging that the Prussian ports be opened to American vessels.⁵ On receiving the second letter Schulenburg transmitted a translation of it to Frederick with a request for instructions.⁶ Frederick's reply possesses such significance that it should never be lost sight of by any one seeking to unravel the king's policy, and all the later correspondence of the Prussian court with the American agent should be scanned in the light of it. Upon the margin of Schulenburg's letter Frederick wrote, "*Mit Complimenten abweisen*", that is, "Put him off with compliments."

Lee's next request was for information concerning the probability that the English would in the following year be able to draw

¹ Frederick to Hertzberg on Hertzberg's letter of August 11, 1777.

² A. Lee to Frederick, July 1, 1777; Frederick to A. Lee, July 2, 1777, both in Sparks and Wharton. See also Schulenburg to Frederick, July 3, 1777.

³ Schulenburg to Frederick, July 6, 1777.

⁴ Schulenburg to Frederick, July 6, 1777; Lee to Committee of Foreign Affairs, July 29, 1777, in Sparks and Wharton.

⁵ A. Lee to Schulenburg, August 13 and September 21, 1777, in Sparks and Wharton.

⁶ Schulenburg to Frederick, October 6, 1777.

more recruits from Germany, Russia, or Denmark.¹ Schulenburg referred Lee's request to Frederick, and upon Schulenburg's letter the king wrote, "none from Russia, none from Denmark, but some men from Anspach, and from the prince of Hesse."² In consenting that Schulenburg should give this information Frederick showed himself in perhaps the most friendly attitude toward the colonies in which he had yet appeared.

About the same time Frederick refused to allow the passage of the mercenary troops from Baireuth, Anspach, and Cassel across his dominions,³ and some writers have seen in this action another evidence of his friendship for America. His correspondence and other writings do not bear out this theory. To his minister to England he wrote that he refused their passage because of certain mutinies that had taken place among the mercenaries the year before while they were on their way to embark.⁴ A passage already quoted from his *Memoirs after the Peace* shows that the refusal gave him some pleasure because it disobliged England. In the same work he states that he refused because he did not like to see Germany denuded of troops.⁵ Furthermore, he was doubtless disgusted by the sight of Germans being sold like cattle, and wished to discourage the practice. In refusing passage to the mercenaries he does not, however, seem to have thought, as some writers have asserted, that he was thereby bestowing belligerent rights upon the colonies, for, as will later be seen, he for a time withdrew the prohibition.

Frederick continued steadfast in the determination not to enter into formal diplomatic relations with the colonies until he was able to see on which side Fortune would declare herself. On November 17, 1777, Arthur Lee wrote to Schulenburg stating that Congress had appointed his brother, William Lee, commissioner to the Prussian court with powers to negotiate a treaty of amity and commerce, and requesting to be informed as to whether it was the king's pleasure that his brother should come to Berlin. But Schulenburg replied that the king "cannot possibly conjecture, as circumstances have not changed, what propositions Mr. Lee can make more acceptable to His Majesty, nor consequently what can be the object of his mission."⁶

On the fourth of the following month Arthur Lee wrote to Schulenburg confirming the glorious news of the surrender of

¹ A. Lee to Schulenburg, October 23, 1777, in Sparks and Wharton.

² Schulenburg to Frederick, November 4, 1777, Circourt, III. 116.

³ Frederick to Goltz, November 10, 1777, *ibid.*, 116; Elliot to Suffolk, November 8, 11, and 16, 1777, *ibid.*, 8, 9.

⁴ Frederick to de Maltzan, November 17 and 28, 1777.

⁵ *Works*, IV. 178.

⁶ Schulenburg to A. Lee, November 28, 1777, in Sparks and Wharton.

Burgoyne. Schulenburg transmitted the letter to Frederick at Potsdam,¹ and the king received the news with great satisfaction. Upon the letter he wrote: "This is very good, but it is necessary to tell him that I expect (*j'attens*) to recognize the independence of the Americans when France shall have set the example." Accordingly, Schulenburg wrote to Lee: "I am much pleased, sir, with these favorable events. . . . I can assure you, sir, that His Majesty will not be the last power to recognize the independence of the Americans, but you will yourself feel that it is not natural that he should be the first, and that at least France, whose political and commercial interests are more immediately connected with yours, should set the example."² Six weeks later Schulenburg again wrote to Lee in the same favorable strain. "His Majesty wishes that your generous efforts may be crowned with complete success; and, as I have already advised you, in my letter of December 18, he will not hesitate to acknowledge your independence whenever France, which is more interested in the event of this contest, shall set the example." He added that the Americans were at liberty to purchase arms in Prussia and that the "bankers Splittgerber, contractors for the manufacture of arms, have received directions to deliver such as you may demand."³

Taking advantage of this permission, Arthur Lee soon afterwards purchased of Messrs. Splittgerber eight hundred fusils of a kind that Schulenburg had recommended as being cheap but serviceable. Later he discovered that the guns were "of the worst and most ordinary workmanship"; they were old worn-out muskets such as even the American militia would reject. Towards the close of 1778 Lee demanded of Schulenburg that Messrs. Splittgerber be compelled to do him justice⁴; but Schulenburg replied that the matter was one which must be left to the courts, and ironically added that Lee, as a good republican, ought to be aware that the Prussian king had no despotic power to force the righting of private breaches of contract.⁵ Thus the result of the permission to purchase arms in Prussia was far from being advantageous to the Americans.

Frederick's motives for expressing his intention of recognizing the Americans when France should have set the example will probably never be determined. He may have thought that Fortune had at last declared herself against England and that the end of the

¹ Schulenburg to Frederick, December 15, 1777, Circourt, III. 125.

² Schulenburg to A. Lee, December 18, 1777, in Sparks and Wharton.

³ Schulenburg to A. Lee, January 16, 1778, in Sparks and Wharton; partly given in Circourt, III. 131.

⁴ A. Lee to Schulenburg, October 21, 1778, in Sparks and Wharton.

⁵ Schulenburg to A. Lee, December 1, 1778.

war was close at hand. Perhaps, with Machiavellian craftiness, he expected that the contents of his letter to Lee would be communicated to the French ministry and would influence them to declare for the Americans and thus become embroiled with England. Whatever his motives may have been, it is unlikely, in view of the obstinate determination of the English to continue the war, that he would have hazarded following France. Just what his action would have been under the conditions then existing on the continent will never be known, for an unexpected event occurred which soon resulted in complications that required all his attention. On December 30, 1777, died Max Joseph, elector of Bavaria. Immediately the ambitious young Emperor Joseph II. proceeded to lay claim to the dead prince's domains and to back up his claims by force of arms. The aged Frederick, feeble though he was and averse to war, felt it necessary to oppose this aggression on the part of Austria and ultimately to wage the short and comparatively bloodless Bavarian War.¹ In consequence, he had little time to think of the struggle in far-off America, and was obliged to be doubly cautious not to become engaged in hostilities with a power which held Hanover and which was on friendly terms with many of the German princes whose support he craved.

It was not long before Frederick was pointing out that he now had no time to think of the war in America. "But the fermentation of affairs in Germany", he wrote March 12 to de Maltzan, "makes me forget that of England with her colonies." He expressed himself in much the same terms when the Americans again pressed their negotiations. When William Lee, after the alliance with France had been consummated, wrote to say that he was hopeful that His Majesty would think it good for him to repair to Berlin, he met with the response² that the king was too much occupied with Germany to think of America, and that while he would, were circumstances favorable, willingly recognize American independence, such action would at that juncture be of no advantage to America and prejudicial to Prussia.

Later in the same month the king again instructed Schulenburg to refuse to enter into a commercial connection with the Americans and to advise them to cultivate relations with maritime states.³ Thus the king's promise to recognize the colonies when France should set the example was not fulfilled.

¹ *Works*, IV. 205-271.

² The answer written on the margin of a letter from Schulenburg to Frederick, March 30, 1778.

³ On Schulenburg's letter to Frederick, March 30, 1778.

So much embarrassed, in fact, did Frederick find himself as a result of the emperor's ambitious designs upon Bavaria that on March 16, 1778, he wrote to de Maltzan in order to inquire whether there was any probability that England would be willing to furnish Hanoverian troops to defend the Germanic Constitution against the emperor's encroachments. In asking for this information he cautioned his minister against letting the English government suspect that he wished to learn anything upon the subject; nevertheless, the letter is certainly in a different strain from one written four years earlier in which the king had said that it was as likely that a good Christian should league himself with the devil as he with England. As it happened, nothing of importance ever came of the inquiry; but Frederick did at times show a somewhat more obliging spirit toward England, and at various times granted permission, at the request of Elliot, for the passage of German mercenaries across his dominions.¹

At times Frederick seems to have grown tired of the persistency of the American agent. Thus, on July 30, 1778, he ordered Schulenburg to write to the agent once more "what I have already ten times said." Again, in the following December we find Schulenburg transmitting to Finckenstein, who was with the king at Breslau, a letter from William Lee, and explaining his reason for doing so as follows: "This letter embarrasses me, particularly because the king, when I presented to His Majesty in the summer another from the agent, seemed to me to be a little disgusted at his returning so often to the charge."² Finckenstein must have shown Lee's letter to Frederick, for on the nineteenth of the same month Frederick wrote to Schulenburg that the American proposed nothing new and that the same answer should be given to him as hitherto.

Even after the close of the short Bavarian War the Prussian king continued without material change the attitude that he had adopted at the beginning of that struggle. What was the only approach, in the remotest degree, to a concession will appear from the following extract from a letter written by Schulenburg to William Lee on January 2, 1779: "I have the honor to tell you, sir, that the ports of His Majesty are open to all nations who come there to trade in goods the importation of which is not forbidden in his states, so that the merchants from America will have no need of express permission in order to enter freely and be well received in the port of Emden or such other as they may choose." He said, however,

¹ Frederick to de Maltzan, February 15, 1780; Elliot to Suffolk, February 28, 1778, and January 7, 1779.

² Schulenburg to Finckenstein, December 8, 1778.

that the king would not protect the commerce of one nation against another, nor shelter in his ports prizes taken by another power. In commenting upon the matter a week later Frederick told Schulenburg that if the Americans wished to come into Emden, it was well and good, but that he could not promise to protect them, and that a perfect neutrality must more than ever be preserved.

Following up the slight encouragement given by Schulenburg, William Lee asked for "an express convention or at least for a positive declaration from His Majesty that he comprehends the United States in the number of nations" who might enter and trade in the Prussian ports.¹ But Schulenburg was not to be thus drawn into what would have constituted a formal recognition of the colonies; he merely replied that further assurances appeared to him to be superfluous and unnecessary.²

From this time onward the relations of the two powers continued without material change until the close of the Revolution. The independence of the colonies was not recognized by Frederick until after it had been recognized by England herself, and it was not until June of 1783 that Baron Goltz at Paris made overtures to Franklin for a commercial agreement between the two countries.³

From the evidence that has been advanced it is clear that the colonies gained but slight advantage from their direct negotiations with the Prussian monarch. At the same time it is unquestionably true that his course in the European politics of the period was, because of coincident interests, of considerable benefit to the struggling patriots across the Atlantic. This was true of Frederick's relations with France. About the time the Revolution broke out conditions were such in Europe that he deemed it desirable to cultivate the friendship of that power. In the ambitious projects of Joseph II. the Prussian king saw a grave menace to the peace of the continent and to the interests of his own kingdom.⁴ At the moment Frederick found himself without any other ally than Russia, and there was "reason to fear", he thought, "that a new war in the Crimea might prevent the empress of Russia from furnishing the king with that aid which she was by treaty obliged to furnish".⁵ Frederick, therefore, deemed it wise to seek an alliance with France. But in the attempt he had a rival. Joseph, too, courted that power and wished to continue the alliance that existed during the Seven Years' War. In accomplishing this end he counted much upon the

¹ W. Lee to Schulenburg, January 30, 1779.

² Schulenburg to W. Lee, February 17, 1779.

³ Goltz to Frederick, June 20, 1783.

⁴ *Works*, IV. 191 *et seq.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, IV. 198.

aid of the French queen, his sister Marie Antoinette. Against him, however, was the old French feeling of hostility to the House of Hapsburg and the knowledge that the previous alliance had been productive of much disaster.

The situation was rendered much more complicated by the war in America. The natural enemy of France was England, and it was almost inevitable that France should seize upon so favorable an opportunity in order to take revenge for the losses inflicted upon her in the previous war. This the far-sighted Frederick early foresaw, and, although he foresaw also the ruinous effects of a new war upon enfeebled France, his desire to see England humbled and his anxiety that France should find occupation outside of Germany led him to encourage the French court to enter the struggle.¹

The diplomatic contest resulted in Frederick's favor. Although Joseph even visited Paris in pursuance of his object, he found the French king and ministry disinclined to listen to his proposals, while the influence of his sister was too slight to bring to pass what he had at heart.² Later the French showed themselves friendly to Frederick, and through a French agent, sent to him under pretext of attending the midsummer reviews of 1777 at Magdeburg, the Prussian monarch succeeded in arriving at an understanding with the French court upon the question of the foreign policy of the two powers.³ Thereafter Frederick continued to encourage France in her desire to humble England and to assure her of his neutrality in case of a struggle.⁴

That these representations were influential in leading the court of France to take up the American cause is not to be doubted. Had Frederick's influence been thrown instead in favor of England, it is quite conceivable that the treaty of 1778 might never have been made. Thus by his attitude the Prussian king rendered consider-

¹ Frederick to de Maltzan, September 28, 1776; to Goltz, April 23, June 11, June 29, October 3, November 14, December 9, 1776, and January 2, 1777, etc.; Circourt, 68, 71, 73. Circourt gives the letter of April 23 incorrectly as April 25.

² Frederick to Goltz, January 2, 1777; *Works*, IV. 189-201.

³ Frederick to Goltz, May 8, June 1, June 7, June 11, 1777; Goltz to Frederick, June 26, 1777; cf. Circourt, III. 90, 92, 93, 95.

⁴ "No, certainly," he wrote to Baron Goltz on July 31, 1777, for the information of France, "we have no jealousy of the aggrandizement of France. We even pray for her success provided her armies are not found near Wesel or Halberstadt." "You can assure M. de Maurepas," he instructed the same minister in the following August, "that I have no connection whatever with England, nor do I grudge to France any advantages she may gain by war with the colonies." "The independence of the colonies will be worth to France all that the war will cost"; "I wager a hundred to one that in case a rupture between the two crowns should break out next year, France could promise herself some great advantages", are two sentences taken from among dozens of similar ones contained in letters written by him to Goltz during the next few months (see Circourt, III. 98-128).

able service to the colonies. But it should be borne in mind that nowhere is there any evidence to show that the favorable influence he exerted sprang out of a love for the struggling patriots across the Atlantic.

In Russia also Frederick secretly opposed the English, and as he was in alliance with the Empress Catharine, his influence was considerable. While he seems to have had no direct connection with the refusal of the empress in 1776 to furnish troops to England, his advice in the years that followed was no small factor in determining her policy.¹ At the Russian court there were two rival parties, headed respectively by Count Panin, who was minister of foreign affairs, and Prince Potemkin; Panin was very friendly to Frederick and was opposed to England, while Potemkin, who wished to discredit his rival, came in time, through the efforts of the English minister, to lean toward the side of England. In matters of foreign affairs, however, the empress generally followed the advice of Panin, and hence the wishes of Frederick had great weight. The English were well aware that Frederick's influence was being cast against them, but were unable to do anything to counteract it, for on the subject of the desirability of allowing England to be humbled Panin and the Prussian king were in complete accord.²

One of the things that Frederick's influence brought about which was contrary to English interests was a more friendly feeling between the courts of Russia and of France,³ but his greatest triumph in this direction was in connection with the formation of the Armed Neutrality. In the early months of 1780 the Russian vessel *Concordia* was seized by the Spaniards, who were now at war with England, and was carried into Cadiz. Angered by this insult to her flag, the empress caused a memorial to be drawn up and presented to the Spanish minister. This had hardly been done before news arrived at St. Petersburg of the seizure of a second vessel. Thereupon the empress, without consulting Panin, ordered her navy to be prepared for active service and adopted measures for the protection of her commerce against the belligerents.⁴ The moment was a most critical one. Prince Potemkin professed to Harris the belief that at last a great triumph had been gained for England.⁵ But when Panin was informed of what the empress had done, he quickly

¹ Bancroft, V. 97 (ed. 1878).

² Harris to Suffolk, February 2, 6, 10, and 24, 1778; to Sir J. Yorke, February 13, 1778; to Weymouth, June 4, 25, August 18, September 20, 1779, February 26, 1780; to Eden, June 29, July 30, 1779; and numerous other letters in *Malmesbury Diaries and Correspondence*, 1844. Frederick to Solms, August 14, 1779, Circourt, III. 225; Goertz to Frederick, September 24, 1779, *ibid.*, 227.

³ *Works*, IV. 201.

⁴ Goertz to Frederick, February 29 and March 3, 1780, Circourt, III. 235, 238.

⁵ Harris to Stormont, February 26, 1780, in *Malmesbury Diaries and Correspondence*.

evolved an adroit plan to turn her action to the disadvantage of the English. This plan he confided to Goertz, and on February 29, 1780, Goertz wrote to Frederick :

All will now depend upon the reply the Spanish court makes to the remonstrances. If it gives a satisfactory one, as they have a right to expect, then I agree with Count Panin in thinking that this new intrigue will result to the disadvantage of the one who contrived it and of his court. If unhappily the court of Spain persists in its false measures, the worst is to be feared. . . . Your Majesty will be best able to enlighten her in the matter, and having already proved your impartiality, you have a right at so important a moment to speak with frankness.¹

Upon receipt of this intelligence Frederick saw the importance of action. On March 14 he sent to his minister at Paris instructions to "demand a particular audience of the ministry at Versailles", and to use every endeavor to induce them to impress upon the Spanish court "the absolute necessity of satisfying Russia without the slightest delay on an article where the honor of her flag is so greatly interested."² The French minister, Vergennes, read Frederick's letter, and despatched a copy of it to the French representative at Madrid with orders to use all his influence to get Spain to apologize.³ The Spanish court saw the wisdom of such a course and followed it. A satisfactory answer was given to Russia, and a possible war was thereby averted.⁴

Later both France and Spain, partly because of advice given by Frederick, acquiesced in the new maritime code that the empress had promulgated on March 8, 1780.⁵ Thus, through the adroit management of Panin and the assistance rendered by Frederick, a declaration that the English minister had hoped would result in an armed conflict between Russia and the family of the Bourbons became in the end a measure wholly opposed to the interests of England. By the part he played in bringing about this result—comparatively unimportant as the Armed Neutrality really proved—Frederick unquestionably contributed indirectly to the success of the colonies.

It was, in fact, in ways such as these that whatever assistance the colonies received from Frederick was chiefly rendered. The direct assistance he gave them was certainly very slight. He did not recognize their independence until it had been recognized by England herself. His commercial concessions were of little real value; his permission to purchase arms in his dominions resulted, though

¹ *Ibid.*, 237-238.

² *Ibid.*, 241.

³ Vergennes to Montmorin, March 27, 1780.

⁴ Goertz to Frederick, May 2, 1780.

⁵ Goertz to Frederick, March 10, Circourt, III. 240, May 2, 1780, and other letters.

through no fault of his own, in a disastrous bargain for the Americans. He gave a little good advice and a small amount of information, but, on the whole, what he did directly was really very trivial. On the other hand, the indirect aid which he rendered as a result of coincident interests was more important. Had he been a friend to England instead of being secretly in opposition to her, it is quite conceivable that the course of history might have been materially changed. The relations between Russia and England might have been different. Certainly France would have hesitated longer. Probably the minor German states would have furnished England with more mercenaries. But "what might have been" is speculation pure and simple.

Less difficult to determine are the motives that moved Frederick in his policy toward the colonies. As has already been pointed out, he hated England with great intensity, yet at the same time he saw clearly that the interests of his kingdom demanded that he should not become her open enemy. In consequence, he carried his hostility just far enough not to embroil him in a war with England. He would not recognize the colonies because that would have taken him over the danger line. At times he even performed friendly acts and exercised great forbearance in order to prevent his relations with England from becoming too strained; instances are his leniency toward Elliot in the matter of the theft of Lee's papers, and his giving permission for the mercenaries to cross his dominions. On the other hand, as a result of his hatred for England, it was psychologically natural that he should feel well-disposed toward the colonies. But it would be easy to overestimate this feeling of friendship. Nowhere is there any evidence to show that he had a very deep interest in the colonies for their own sake. Unquestionably he wished them success, but all expressions of friendship made by him or his ministers should be scrutinized in the light of his avowed intention to procrastinate in the negotiations and of his instruction to Schulenburg, "Mit Complimenten abweisen." Frederick was, indeed, very much interested in the contest; of this the hundreds of letters in which he mentioned the subject are proof conclusive. But the reader of these letters can see with half an eye that it is in the effect of the war upon England and upon the politics of Europe that he was chiefly interested, not in its effects upon the colonies. At one time a story was widely current, and it is still believed by many, to the effect that he entertained a great admiration for Washington, and that he even went so far as to send him a sword upon which was inscribed, "From the oldest general in the world to the greatest." This is one of those many historical myths that have been eagerly accepted by

a willing and credulous public, and it has been completely exploded.¹ Furthermore, as Bancroft admits, there is nowhere in Frederick's correspondence any trace of a personal interest in Washington.² Much the same may be affirmed of his interest in the colonies. His rather friendly attitude toward them was due chiefly to his hatred for England and to his desire to keep a way open for commercial relations with the new power in case it should sustain its independence. There is little or no evidence to prove that sentiment was a factor in determining his policy.

PAUL LELAND HAWORTH.

¹ See an article by Moncure D. Conway in *The Century Magazine*, XIX. 945.

² Preface to Vol. X. (original edition, 1874).